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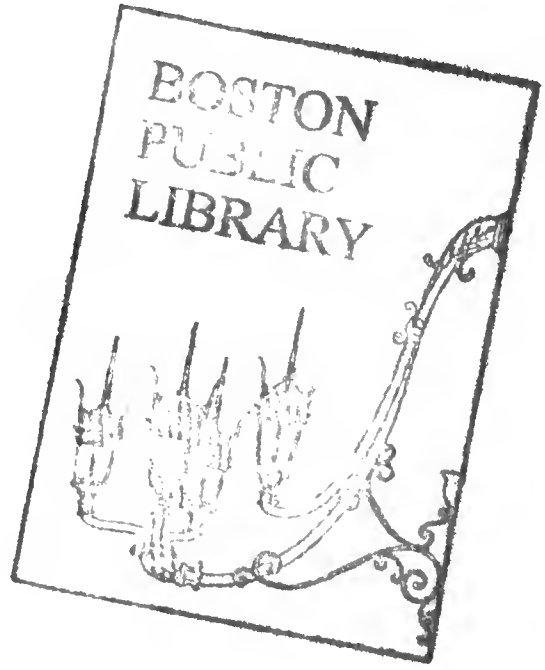

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PRELIMINARY SITE EVALUATION

CHARLESTOWN INDUSTRIAL AREA

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Preliminary Site Evaluation
CHARLESTOWN INDUSTRIAL AREA

Advanced Planning Division

May 27, 1970

I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

In April, the BRA Planning Department was asked by the Authority's Institutional and Industrial Development Section and the Economic Development and Industrial Commission (EDIC), to conduct a study of the area in the vicinity of the MBTA Sullivan Square station and yard in Charlestown (see Appendix, Maps 1 and 2). The purpose of the study was to determine whether the area could be developed as a planned industrial site. The impetus for the study was the recent EDIC/BRA industrial survey which concluded that there was a need for more industrial land in Boston. The interest in the Charlestown area is a result of the proposed relocation of the MBTA's rapid transit line from the present elevated tracks in Charlestown to the Boston and Maine right-of-way. It was felt that this relocation would make available all or a portion of the existing Sullivan Square Station and yard for industrial uses. In addition, the vacant or underutilized land in the vicinity of the MBTA property was to be studied to determine the feasibility of its inclusion in the proposed industrial area.

II. LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The 48 acre study area was divided, for examination purposes, into three major sections (see Appendix, Maps 3 and 4).

Section A, about 19 acres in size, is occupied primarily by the present MBTA station and yard. Section B, 9 acres in size and contiguous to A, is in predominantly industrial use. It contains outmoded and deteriorating structures, vacant and underutilized land, including a number of tax foreclosed properties. Section C, located north of the Mystic River, is about 20 acres of mostly vacant land which is traversed by the MBTA elevated railway structure, due to be abandoned. Approximately two acres of the site are public streets.

III. SITE ANALYSIS

The findings of the EDIC/BRA study indicated that Boston's decline as an employment center has been attributed to factors such as: increased dependence upon trucking by businesses, accessibility problems due to central city congestion, new production processes requiring different types of structures, and lack of expansion space. Although Boston has been losing manufacturing activities steadily, the EDIC/BRA report recommended that the City make a concentrated effort to retain and attract high and medium growth manufacturing firms such as those producing machinery, instruments, and chemicals. Such activities were recommended due to their labor intensity and their resultant potential for needed jobs.

Accepted standards used in evaluating sites for planned industrial areas include: good access to transportation, adequate utility service, and reasonably level, flood-free land which is well-drained and has good bearing characteristics. Such sites should be of sufficient size and shape to provide large parcels needed for modern plant design plus parking, off-street loading areas, landscaping and expansion space. Land costs and relocation problems should not be prohibitive.

The study area was evaluated in terms of the above EDIC findings and planning criteria.

A. Access

Sections A and B (see Appendix, Maps 3 and 4) are approximately one-half mile from the proposed access ramp of Interstate Route 93 in

Somerville and one block from the proposed new Sullivan Square MBTA Station. Sections A and B are adjacent to the Boston and Maine railroad tracks and are served by spur lines. Section C is less accessible to these facilities, but is contiguous to Alford Street, a heavily traveled truck route. Additionally, since Sections A and C are contiguous to the Mystic River, they could provide waterside facilities.

B. Utilities

Because of the present industrial uses in the area, Sections A and B are well served by utilities. The extension of utility service to Section C, now vacant, should not be difficult due to surrounding industrial development.

C. Pattern of Ownership

Approximately 75% of the study area, most of Sections A and C, are owned by the MBTA. Section B is under 13 owners, and includes several parcels tax foreclosed by the City of Boston and MBTA right of way land. (See Appendix, Table 1).

D. Soil Conditions

The presence and condition of the large structures on Sections A and B of the area indicate good bearing characteristics. Section C is vacant of buildings and fronts on the Mystic River on two sides, therefore its soil characteristics are largely untested. The MBTA elevated tracks attest to some bearing capacity, however. A soils study of all sections should be undertaken as soon as possible to fully evaluate bearing capacity and drainage.

E. Land Use Evaluation

The 48 acre study area appears to be of sufficient size to provide several sites for the type of industries which EDIC findings recommend. Several of the area's large masonry buildings including the power plant should be evaluated in depth to determine their possible re-use in a planned industrial area. Table II of the appendix, details the results of a land use and exterior building condition survey of the study area.

F. Land Costs

Table III of the Appendix lists sales prices (since 1962) in the study area. Vacant land costs range from $1 to $1.59 per square foot, averaging $1.30. The cost of land with buildings range from $.63 to $5.37 a square foot, averaging $2.30. In 1966, a nearby industrial park in Somerville, purchased a 50 acre area from the Boston and Maine Railroad for $1 a square foot. Inflation of prices since 1966, would place an estimate of the cost of vacant land at approximately 30% higher or $1.30 per square foot. Salvage value of the MBTA tracks and elevated structure would lower the land costs.

G. Relocation

The Boston Police Listing of January, 1970, indicates that two families live in the study area (Section B). The 1969 Polk Business Directory lists 18 businesses within the area. Relocation of the families, including full services by BRA, would be necessary to the redevelopment of the full site. The amount of business relocation is partially dependent on the feasibility of integrating some of the existing businesses into the proposed complex.

H. General Evaluation

With the reservations indicated concerning soil characteristics and building conditions, the site appears to be suitable for redevelopment as a planned industrial area in terms of the criteria stated earlier and the findings of the EDIC/BRA study. The other major considerations are land availability and site assembly. The alternative possibilities concerning these considerations are discussed below.

IV. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT POSSIBILITIES

In considering development possibilities, Section C has been treated separately from the area near Sullivan Square (Sections A and B) since the two areas are physically separated by the Mystic River.

In all probability, the MBTA-owned land in Section C will be declared surplus and made available to the city when the elevated line is discontinued since the land is vacant except for the elevated structure. In its entirety, Section C contains 20 acres of land in a 3,800 foot frontage on Alford Street which averages 350 feet in depth. Estimated acquisition costs of the vacant land at $1.30 per square foot are $1.3 million. As mentioned earlier, income from the salvaging of the elevated structure would offset some of the cost.

In examining the Sullivan Square area, two major issues must be considered:

A. The amount of land which will be made available from the MBTA and

B. The desirability of the city becoming involved in taking private land to acquire the non-MBTA land (primarily in Section B).

Based on these two considerations, four development possibilities for the Sullivan Square area are evaluated below:

1. All of the MBTA land in Section A would become available and the remaining portions of Section A plus all of Section B would be acquired as well.

This would produce a 27 acre site roughly trapezoidal in shape bordered by Mystic Avenue, Alford Street and the river. It would ential an estimated land cost of $1.6 million. Adequate information is not known about the interior conditions of the buildings in the study area to make a reasonable estimate of acquisition costs for the buildings. Such costs would, of course, substantially increase the total acquisition price. If section C were added to this package, the acreage would be the total of 48 of the entire study area and the total acquisition cost would be in excess of $2.7 million.

2. Only sub-section A_2 would become available from the MBTA and, as above, the non-MBTA portions of A_2 plus all of Section B would also be acquired.

This alternative would provide an L-shaped 16 acre site, divided into three sections by the existing Dorrance Street and Arlington Avenue. The estimated land acquisition costs would be $.9 million. Again, an estimate of costs of buildings could not be made. The addition of Section C to this alternative would provide a total of 36 acres of developable land at an estimated acquisition cost of more than $2.0 million.

3. All of the MBTA land in Section A would become available, but to avoid private land taking, the non-MBTA land in Section A and all of Section B would be excluded.

This alternative would create deep irregular-shaped 19 acre site with a split frontage on Alford Street and considerable river frontage.

Land acquisition costs would total approximately $1 million. If Section C were also acquired, the acreage would total 39 and the estimated acquisition costs would be in excess of $2.2 million.

4. Only the MBTA land within sub-section A_2 would become available, and no private land would be acquired.

This alternative would result in an 11 acre site with land acquisition costs approximately $.6 million. The addition of Section C would result in a total of 31 acres of developable land at an estimated acquisition cost of $1.8 million.

The costs and acreages of the alternative development possibilities are summarized below:

1.	Sections A and B (with Section C)	28 acres (48 acres)	$1.6 million ($2.7 million)
2.	Sections A_2 and B (with Section C)	16 acres (36 acres)	$ .9 million ($2.0 million)
3.	Section A (with Section C)	19 acres (39 acres)	$1.0 million ($2.2 million)
4.	Section A_2 (with Section C)	11 acres (31 acres)	$ .6 million ($1.8 million)
	Section C	20 acres	$1.2 million

The type of sites which would be made available to industrial firms under any of the above alternatives would depend on site planning criteria including setbacks on front and side yards, landscaping and parking requirements, and the construction of new roads and spur lines, if necessary.

V. FUTURE STUDIES

The decision of the MBTA regarding the availability of its land is obviously crucial to further planning. Based on that decision, to adequately evaluate which of the above alternatives is most desirable from the city's point of view, and in particular, how important the inclusion of Section B would be to the success of the area, a site planning study is the necessary next step. Additionally, three other studies are desirable to continue the planning process:

1. Soil surveys and borings to determine the development feasibility of Section C.

2. Interior surveys of existing buildings in the study area to determine re-use potential.

3. A business relocation study to determine relocation requirements of the existing firms based on their appropriateness for inclusion in the planned industrial area.

This study was
prepared by Roy Bishop
under the direction
of Robert Lurcott

APPENDIX

(To be used with 200 scale map)

TABLE I, Page 1

PARCEL	AREA	ADDRESS	OWNER	ASSESSED LAND VALUE	ASSESSED BUILDING VALUE
1	996	8 Sherman Square	D. Gibbons	300	
2	800	7 Sherman Square	R. Flynn	300	100
	850	6 Sherman Square	R. Flynn	300	700
3	1030	5 Sherman Square	City of Boston	400	
	950	4 Sherman Square	City of Boston	400	
	942	3 Sherman Square	City of Boston	400	
	942	2 Sherman Square	City of Boston	400	
	917	655 Main Street	City of Boston	400	
4	3960	653 Main Street	J. Flynn	1800	700
5	3420	651 Main Street	Alvia Co., Inc.	2700	3300
6	8523	Sherman Street	MBTA		
7	13011	5 Sherman Street	Dorran Mfg. Co.	10000	12000
	11449	7 - 9 Sherman Street	Dorran Mfg. Co.	5000	5000
8	53478	8 Dorrance Street	Eric Realty	38000	10000
9	14486	10 - 14 Dorrance Street	Anjo Realty	10000	
10	47030	96 - 104 Arlington Avenue	SLB Realty	35500	32500
11	5150	96 - 104 Arlington Avenue	MBTA	2500	

EXISTING OWNERSHIP - PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL AREA - CHARLESTOWN

PARCEL	AREA	ADDRESS	OWNER	ASSESSED LAND VALUE	ASSESSED BUILDING VALUE
	4450	96 - 104 Arlington Avenue	MBTA	2500	
12	9543	92 - 94 Arlington Avenue	Cork Engineering and Insulating Co., Inc.	5700	10800
	1050	88 Arlington Avenue	" " "	400	
13	1007	86 Arlington Avenue	E. H. Allen, Co.	400	
	1026	84 Arlington Avenue	E. H. Allen, Co.	400	
	1026	82 Arlington Avenue	E. H. Allen, Co.	500	800
	6536	24 Dorrance Street	E. H. Allen, Co.	3300	5200
14	918	80 Arlington Avenue	City of Boston	600	1800
15	1026	78 Arlington Avenue	M. Krickman	600	1800
16	49430	Main Street	MBTA	49500	511200
	203,296	Main Street	MBTA	203300	896000
	4154	Alford Street	MBTA	1600	1900
	278,900	Arlington Avenue	MBTA	139,400	325,300
	65,607	Arlington Avenue	MBTA	262,000	108,000

EXISTING OWNERSHIP - PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL AREA - CHARLESTOWN

PARCEL	AREA	ADDRESS	OWNER	ASSESSED LAND VALUE	ASSESSED BUILDING VALUE
	16,995	Arlington Avenue	MBTA	6800	
	143,875	Arlington Avenue	MBTA	56000	610700
17	26,304	West Street	Boston Gas	14000	36000
18	12,140	26 Alford Street	MBTA	12500	4500
	46,251	26 Alford Street	MBTA	50000	7000
19	14,600	Arlington Avenue	C. M. Hoyt, Jr. Trust	12400	22600
20	235,000	Alford Street (rear)	Monsanto Chemical Corp.	10000	
21	626,369	Alford Street	MBTA	93500	457000
TOTALS:	1,981,222	(46 acres)		1,033,500	3,187,400

Street Areas	Square Feet
Arlington Avenue	50,000
Beacham Street	500
Dorrance Street	18,600
West Street	2,600
TOTALS:	71,700

TABLE II

LAND USE AND BUILDING CONDITION SURVEY
PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL AREA - CHARLESTOWN

(To be used with Map 3)

BUILDING NO.	LAND USE	DESCRIPTION	BUILDING CONDITION
1	garage	1 story concrete	fair
2	commercial (bar)	2 story brick	good
3	residential (appears to be using adjacent city-owned land for the storage of junk autos).	2 story brick and frame	fair
4	shed	3 story brick	fair
5	garage, wood-working shop	1-2 story	good
6	office	1 story brick	good
7	storage building	1 story	good
8	office	1 story	good
	motor freight office	2 story	good
9	storage	1 story	fair
10	office	1 story	fair
11	industrial	2 story brick and wood	fair
12	lumber shed	2 story	fair
13	metal works-1st fl. woodworking-2nd fl.	brick and concrete	fair

BUILDING NO.	LAND USE	DESCRIPTION	BUILDING CONDITION
14	chemical works, warehouse, office	2 story	good
15	woodworking and sheet metal works	2 story	good
16	office - 1st floor machine shop - 2nd		good
17	sheet metal works	2 story	good
18	office - 1st floor vacant - 2nd office or residential 3rd	3 story frame	fair
19	commercial	3 story	fair
20	office	2 story wood	fair
21	Boston Gas sub-station, adjacent storage bldg.	2 story brick	good
22	shed, vacant additional shed on site used by parking attendant	1 story iron 1 story wood	poor good
23	garage	built 1935 2 story concrete floors	good
24	administration building	2-3 story built 1948-1950 concrete frame, floors and roof	good
25	welding garage	2 story brick, concrete floor and roof (circular design)	good
26	unknown	brick	good
27	power substation machine shop equipment shop	1-2 story brick, built 1901-1907	good

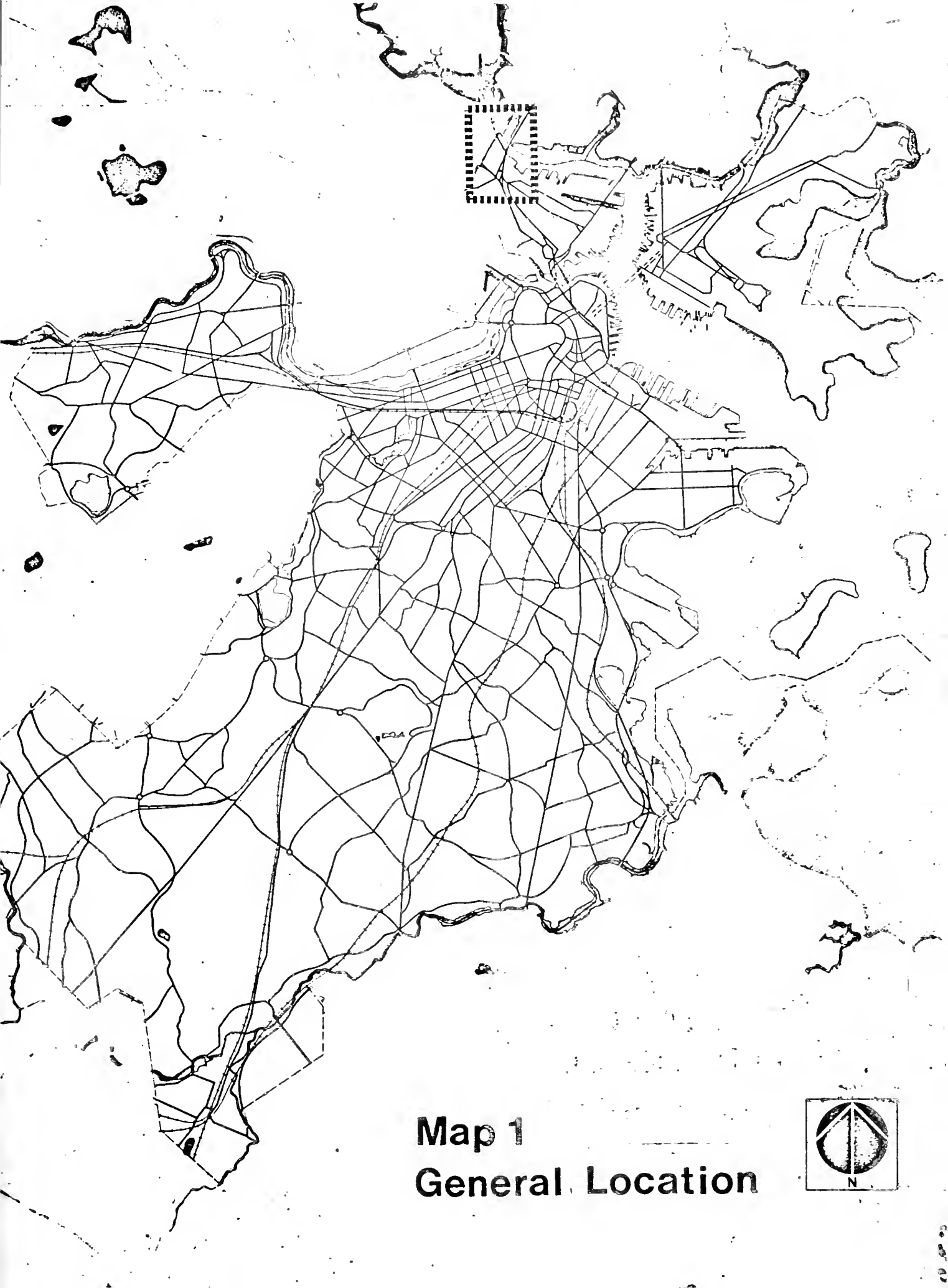
BUILDING NO.	LAND USE	DESCRIPTION	BUILDING CONDITION
28	garage	2 story brick	good
29	tool department	2 story brick	good
30	salt house	1-2 story	good
31	vehicle repair	1 story	good
32	storage	1 story wood	poor
33	cement storage	1 story	fair
34	sand dryer	2-3 story	poor
35	storage shed	brick	good
36	bus repair	1 story built 1964	good
37	bus wash	1 story built 1964	good
38	Tanner's extract and wax storage (attached storage building in rear, brick and metal construction).	4 story	fair
39	steel shop	2-3 story steel frame construction	fair
40	2 sheds, storage		fair

RECENT SALE PRICES IN AREA
(To be used with 200 scale map)

TABLE III

ADDRESS	NUMBER ON MAP	PRICE	DATE	AREA	ASSESSED VALUE	PRICE SQ. FT.	PRICE ASSESSED VALUE RATIO
6 Sherman Square	2	$ 1,000	07-23-68	850	1000	$1.18	$1.00
8 Sherman Square	1	1,000	07-23-68	996	300	1.00	3.33
6-8 Sherman Square	1,2	2,000	10-01-69	1846	1300	1.08	1.54
7 Sherman Square	2	1,000	10-01-69	800	400	1.25	2.50
7 Sherman Square	2	500	12-18-69	800	400	.63	1.25
5-9 Sherman Street	7	35,500	04-23-69	24460	32000	1.45	1.11
8 Dorrance Street	8	75,000	03-06-63	53478	48000	1.41	1.56
10-14 Dorrance Street	9	25,000	11-06-63	14480	10000	1.73	2.50
10-14 Dorrance Street	9	23,000	10-23-68	14480	10000	1.59	2.30
22 Dorrance Street	13	35,000	11-24-65	6536	8500	5.37	4.12
96-104 Arlington Avenue	11	75,000	01-09-63	49964	68000	1.50	1.10
27 West Street	17	85,000	10-24-62	26304	50000	3.23	1.70

SOURCE: Metropolitan Mortgage Bureau



Map 1
General Location

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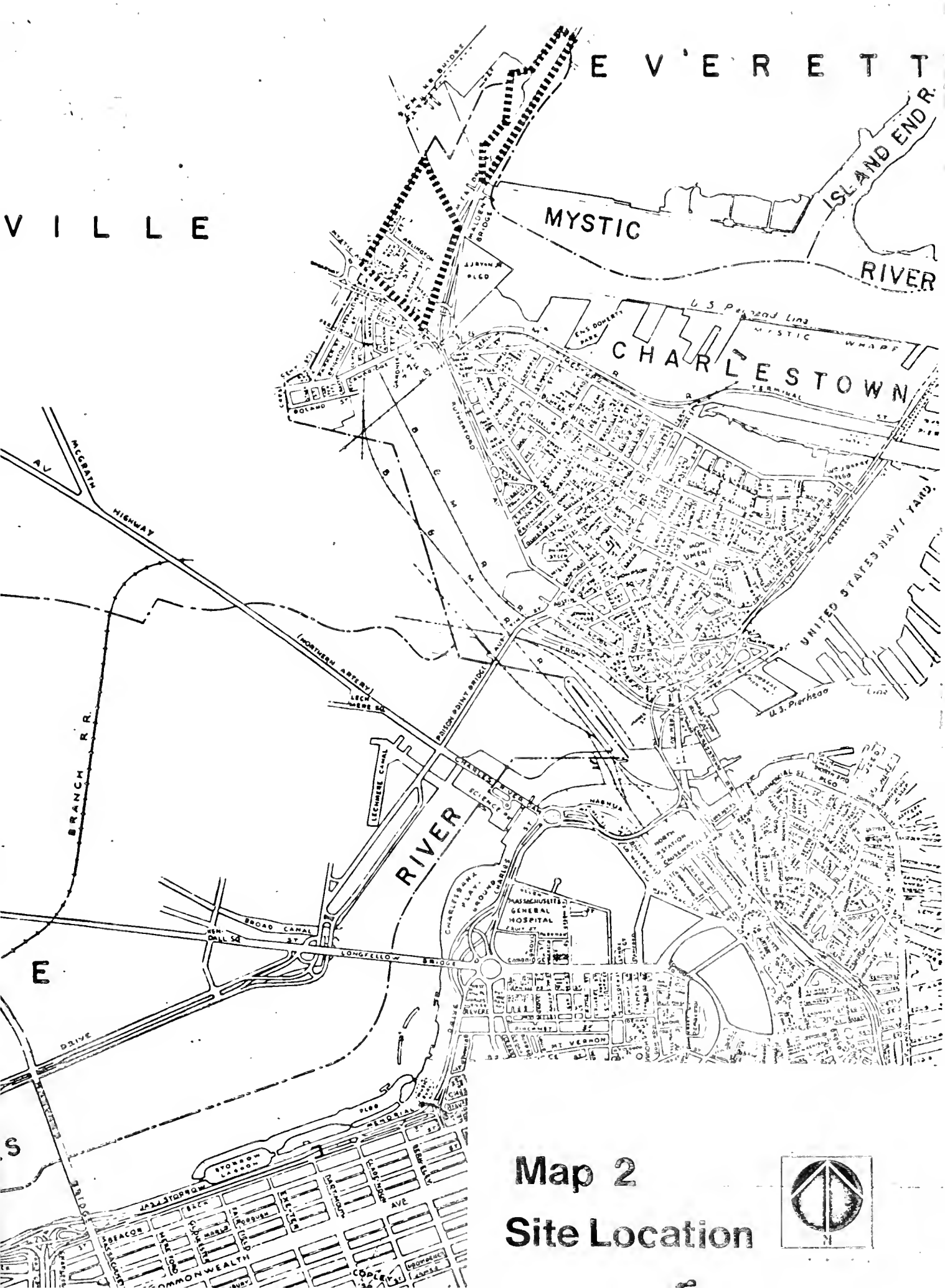
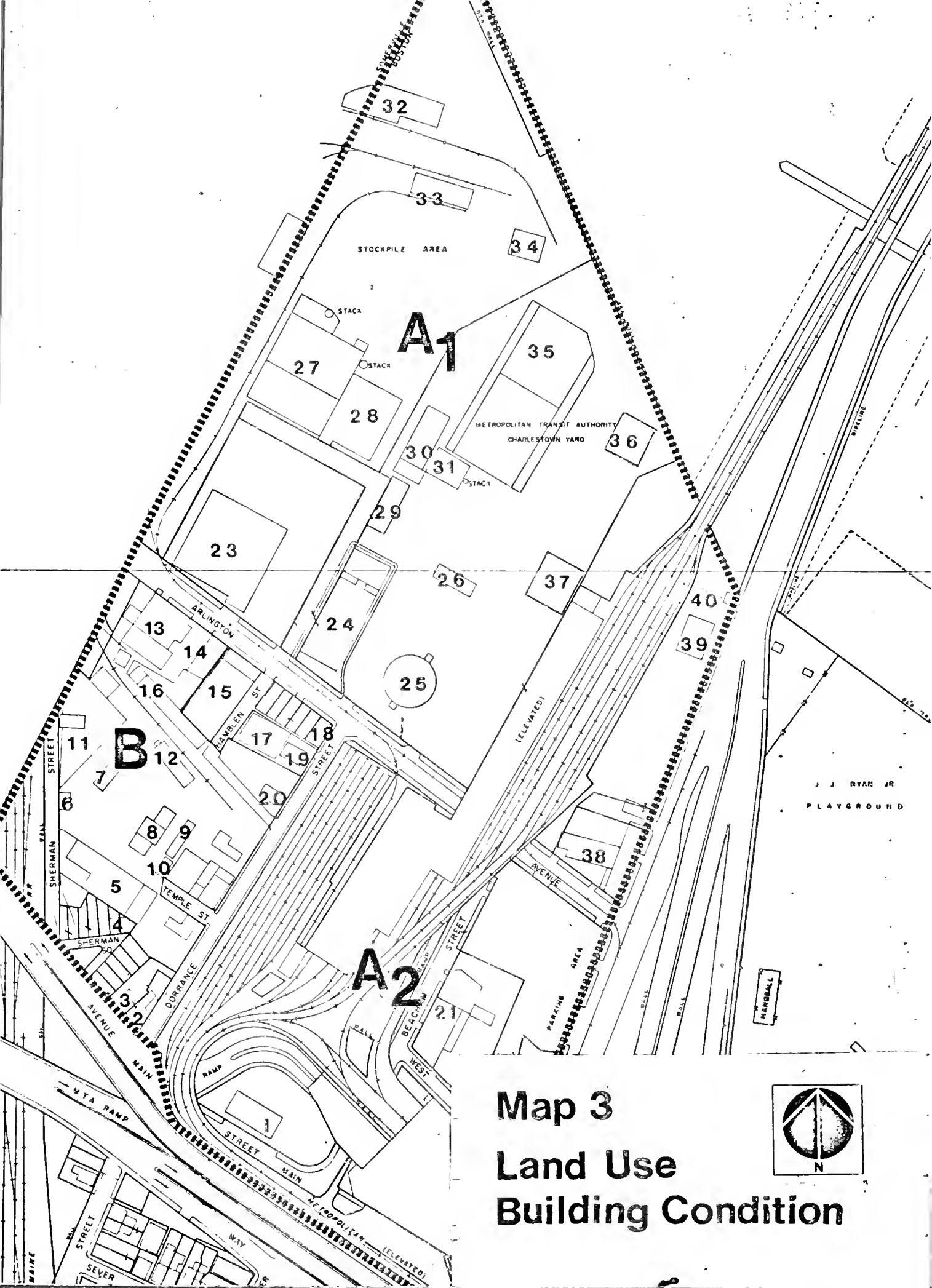
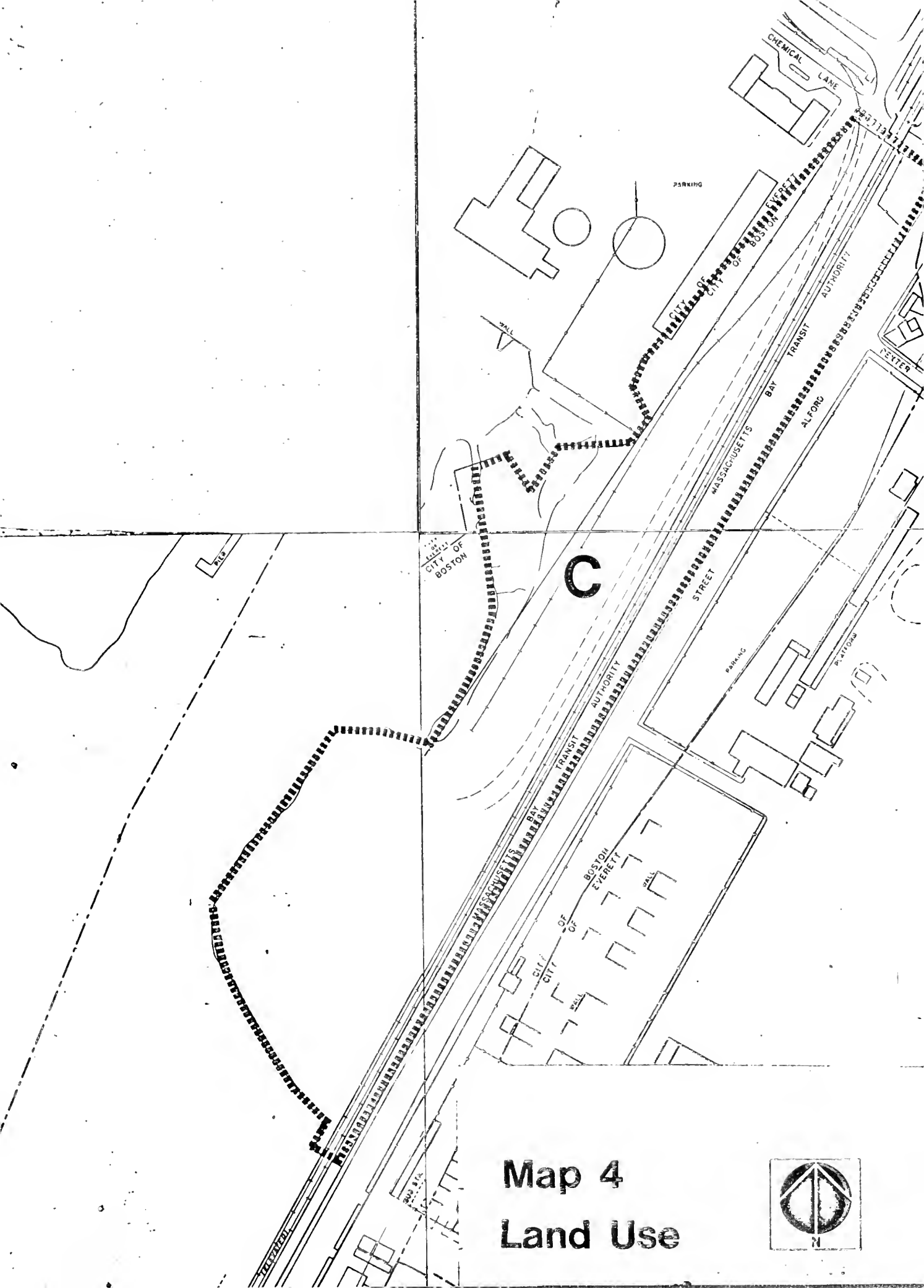


Map 2

Site Location



Map 3
Land Use
Building Condition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Map 4
Land Use
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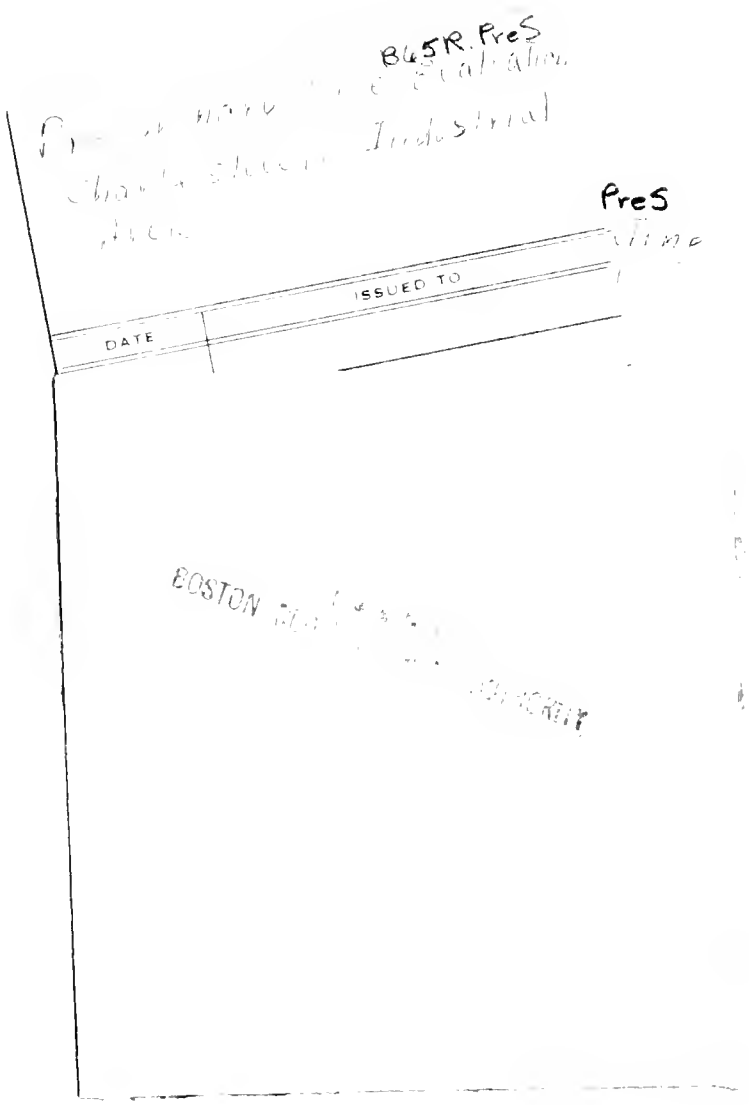
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